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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000464

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN ELECTION: IRANIAN AZERIS STRONGLY FOR MOUSAVI

Classified By: PolEcon Counselor Rob Garverick, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) Feedback to Baku Iran watcher from more than twenty Iranians in Baku (half normally resident in Iran) suggests that the recent much-publicized upsurge of support for Mousavi is real, at least among ethnic Azeris (the majority of this sample). All but three of the contacts said they would vote against Ahmadinejad; all but one of these said they and most of their friends would vote for Mousavi. Many asserted that Mousavi will win big, "unless the election is stolen." However, the sole Ahmadinejad supporter, an academic with rural roots who is not Azeri, argued that the middle class and student views reflected in the Western press and this sample do not accurately reflect the large advantage Ahmadinejad has among rural and poor urban voters, his superior cash distribution and voter mobilization infrastructure, and alleged "behind the scenes" support from Supreme Leader Khomeini, will give Ahmadinejad the victory, possibly in the first round. End Summary.

Middle-Class Iranians, Students Supporting Musavi

12. (C) One Iranian student said he would not vote, but hoped Ahmadinejad will win "because then the system will collapse faster." He added that he could not in good conscience vote for Mousavi, as the latter "has blood on his hands" from the mass executions in the 1980's, when Mousavi was Prime Minister. A second source implied he would vote for Ahmadinejad, while a third said he would vote against Ahmadinejad, but did not indicate whom he would support. No one explicitly supported Rezai or Karroubi, whom one student interlocutor described as a "weak old man."

Mousavi Support from Azeris...

13. (C) Most informants agreed that Mousavi's support (and this sample) is strongest with Azeris, young people, businessmen, educated people, and bazaaris. Mousavi is an ethnic Azeri, and is apparently attempting to broaden his base by reaching out to national minorities, including Azeris, e.g. by promising to allow limited use of local languages in public schools (now strictly forbidden in practice, though not in law). This is a potentially potent argument for many people in Iranian Azerbaijan, especially given the recent third anniversary of the "Cockroach" scandal and reported widespread student protests commemorating this

anniversary. Cultural gestures by Mousavi have also resonated well among educated groups: one elderly Azeri business executive told Iran watcher that "my heart filled with joy when Mousavi appeared in public , holding hands with his wife."

And Business People

14. (C) Anecdotal reports suggest that many Iranian business people and bazaaris also support Mousavi, if only to get rid of Ahmadinejad. A businessman who was recently in the Tehran bazaar engaged three bazaaris in conversation at a local teahouse. All said they would be voting for Mousavi and against Ahmadinejad. One contrasted "honest and smart" Mousavi with "honest and stupid" Ahmadinejad, a man "who has played all his cards." Another commented that Ahmadinejad is a "man from whom we can expect nothing good." All three believed that Rafsanjani supports Mousavi, and will influence him to adopt better business policies. They told the businessman that bazaaris as a group feel burned by AJ, and said most will not willingly support him. Four middle-aged Iranians from Tabriz, encountered separately by Iran watcher during the June 2-5 Baku Oil and Gas exhibition also said that they were supporting Mousavi. One asserted that she was sure that Mousavi will beat Ahmadinejad handily "If the vote is honest," as Iranian onlookers nodded in agreement. Two other interlocutors (a student and a businessman) similarly opined that Mousavi will win big "if the vote is not stolen."

15. (C) Another Baku-based Iranian businessman, a non-Azeri

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who supports Mousavi, claimed that he has been sharing election related emails with his personal network of over 120 Iranian business contacts, and that "all of them are against Ahmadinejad." His biggest challenge, he said, is persuading them to vote at all. He added that he recently sent his contacts a Persian-language email listing "Twenty-four Reasons to Vote against Ahmadinejad." This same businessman escorted a five-person Iranian fencing team to a meet in Baku in early June. He related that all of them openly complained about Ahmadinejad, and said they would not vote for him. All but one asserted that they will vote for Mousavi.

So - Where is Ahmadinejad's Support?

16. (C) Some middle-class Mousavi supporters conceded that Ahmadinejad is likely ahead with the village vote, though one student noted hopefully that "many villagers are also young, and think like us." Other interlocutors noted that Ahmadinejad's administration has given villagers cash grants and subsidies, and claimed many villagers will support him because they hope for more of the same. Three interlocutors, one friendly to Ahmadinejad, added that villagers see Ahmadinejad as uniquely coming from a milieu like their own, reflecting a Iranian social-political phenomenon which one Tehran factory owner termed "the victory of the village."

17. (C) An academic with rural roots, who recently returned from a visit to Shiraz-area villages, noted that the conservatives are seen as having delivered on good roads, electricity, health care, and water services to the rural areas, and claimed this works to the benefit of AJ. He added that Ahmadinejad has unique networks of Basij and government workers in the villages that he may be able to use to distribute cash incentives and otherwise mobilize support for him. He opined that Khomeini dislikes Mousavi (though they are related), and will intervene behind the scenes to support Ahmadinejad. Based on his observations and analysis , he forecast a solid Ahmadinejad victory.

Ahmadinejad Victory - Good for U.S.?

¶8. (C) The academic added that an Ahmadinejad victory could be better for the United States than a Mousavi win. Citing contacts among Ahmadinejad's circle, he claimed that Ahmadinejad is personally in favor of improved relations with the United States, but has so far been unable to persuade supreme leader Khomeini. The academic opined that Ahmadinejad is more able than his opponents to actually effect an improved relationship with the United States, a la "Nixon to China," as his right flank is not as vulnerable as the other candidates. Citing unnamed "well-connected" sources, the academic claimed that Ahmadinejad has indicated privately that he wants to improve relations with the U.S., and has tried unsuccessfully to push Khomeini in this direction. (Note: This source is the only Iranian interlocutor who expressed pro-Ahmadinejad sentiments to Iran watcher. End Note).

Mousavi Victory - Bad for Hamas?

¶9. (C) Several contacts opined that, if elected, Mousavi will try to reduce Iranian adventurism in Lebanon and financial subsidies to Hamas and Hezbollah. A wealthy businessman from Tehran told Iran watcher that Mousavi had opposed providing financial aid to Yasir Arafat in the 1980's, but was overruled by Khomeini and Khomeini. He asserted that Mousavi is not interested in foreign adventurism at this point, and "believes that all this Iranian money is needed for development of industry and education at home."

Future Foreign Policy: Up to Khomeini

¶10. (C) Whatever the personal policy opinions of the two candidates, several contacts noted that no (Iranian President) can do anything to change Iranian foreign and security policies without the explicit approval of Khomeini. A prominent Azerbaijani Iran-watcher also recently made this point to Iran watcher, warning "that you Americans are

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excessively focused on this contest," the outcome of which "may not change much (substantively) for you." That being said, one Iranian contact did speculate that Mousavi has a more independent political base than AJ, and is more likely to try and succeed at outmaneuvering Khomeini over time, theoretically leading to less expansionist and more economy-directed Iranian foreign policy priorities.

Comment

¶11. (C) While the large majority of Baku Iran Watcher's informants enthusiastically supported Mousavi, it is important to note that most of them are ethnic Azeris (like Mousavi), and/or from those groups (students, businessmen) known to be most alienated by Ahmadinejad and his policies. We should bear in mind that the large majority of potential Iranian voters do not come from these media-highlighted groups. If the analysis of the pro-Ahmadinejad academic about the latter's rural support and vote mobilization capabilities holds up, Ahmadinejad is still likely to prevail (though perhaps not until the second round). Should that happen, comments from Baku interlocutors (including confident allegations that Ahmadinejad can only win by fraud) suggest that the level of estrangement between the Iranian middle class/Azeris and the central government may increase.
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